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ABSTRACT

Student advisement in secondary schools is discussed in this booklet. Chapter 1 introduces the topic of student advisement, presents the history of advisement, describes the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) Model Schools Project, and presents a rationale for advisement. Chapter 2 lists 5 teacher adviser responsibilities and lists 10 objectives which can give vision to a successful advisement program for a middle level or secondary school. Chapter 3 discusses the need for advisement. Chapter 4 focuses on personalized education. It includes a depiction of a model of personalized education which consist of diagnosis, prescription, instruction, and evaluation. Chapter 5 discusses the four major areas which define advisement and represent key activities of teacher advisers: adviser-advisee relationships; adviser-staff interactions; adviser-parent contacts; and advisory group activities. Chapter 6 discusses the logistics of advisement, including assignment of students; who should advise; scheduling; roles; inservices; and recordkeeping. Chapter 7 presents descriptions of seven exemplary programs. Chapter 8 summarizes the benefits of advisement and contends that when advisement is incorporated into a total school program, student achievement increases, attitudes toward school improve, and discipline problems decrease. The appendix includes the Teacher Adviser Handbook. (ABL)

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ADVISEMENT PROGRAMS

A
New Look
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THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

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Advisement Programs

A New Look at an Old Practice

By John M. Jenkins

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS
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Preface

Most educational reforms and new programs come and go; educators try them and either drop them or move on to the next promising practice. Advisement is one of the few educational innovations to have a lasting impact on schooling during this century. In fact, it has grown stronger.

Advisement is a simple idea but very powerful in its consequences. It is teachers and other qualified adults helping students with school-related issues and problems. When properly implemented, advisement is one of the most effective means available to educators to help students become more satisfied and successful.

Teachers who are successful advisers never want to relinquish the role. They rate it the most important thing they do in school, even ahead of their subject matter teaching. They stay with it informally even if the formal program founders. Advisement can make the most significant difference in the climate of a school in less time than any other educational practice.

Why, then, haven't all schools implemented some form of advisement? The reasons are few but complex. Some schools have never tried it. Others have tried and failed, because of faulty conceptualization (too much group guidance), poor implementation (lack of administrative support or too short a timeline), or just plain sabotage (teacher opposition).

All these obstacles can and have been overcome in schools with real commitment to helping all students succeed. The secrets to successful implementation are good will, collaborative planning, continuing administrative and faculty support, and enough time to work out the inevitable kinks in the change process.

Advisement is necessary to student success. Schools that provide it are better places for both students and teachers. It works! Just ask the schools featured in this volume.

Our sincere thanks to John Jenkins, a school leader and scholar for four decades, for his comprehensive and compelling treatment of one of the most important concepts in educational practice.

James W. Keefe
Director of Research, NASSP

Chapter One

Introduction

The current movement toward restructuring schools has brought with it a desire on the part of educators and legislators to expand the amount of personal attention provided for each student on the premise that schools will improve accordingly.

In *A Study of High Schools*, sponsored by the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the Commission on Educational Issues of the National Association of Independent Schools, high school educators were cited for their inability to personalize the process of education (Powell, Farrar, and Cohen, 1985).

The Carnegie Corporation report, *Turning Points* (1989), on middle level education, specifically called for "assigning an adult advisor to each student." The task force that wrote the report concluded that "every student should be well-known by at least one adult."

The Florida state legislature passed a teachers-as-advisers law during the 1984 legislative session that enabled school officials to apply for grants to establish high school advisement programs. This legislation was extended to the middle level in 1988. As a result of this legislation, more than 200 middle level and high schools have been awarded grants totaling more than \$20 million.

Several schools in the Coalition of Essential Schools, which is an outgrowth of *A Study of High Schools*, have attempted to implement advisement programs as a means of increasing student academic achievement (Cushman, 1990).

These new efforts to focus on the needs of individual students are a tacit recognition of an old idea that has been with us in various forms and in various settings. Advisement may be an idea whose time has finally come. Educational leaders who look to reshape schools in the '90s should focus on the belief that quality schools are created one student at a time.

History of the Advisement Concept

The earliest formal reference to the concept of advisement at the secondary level can be traced to the Dalton Laboratory Plan developed by Helen Parkhurst for a high school in Dalton, Mass., in 1921.

The Dalton Laboratory Plan replaced traditional classrooms with laboratories designated for specific academic disciplines. Students worked in

the laboratories on monthly contracts under the direction of one or more teachers. The students met each morning with their homeroom teachers who helped them select the contracts on which they wished to work and scheduled their time into the appropriate laboratories (Edwards, 1991).

Although the term "teacher adviser" was never used, clearly, the homeroom teacher served as an adviser to several high school students.

The first formal teacher adviser program was established at the New Trier High School in Winnetka, Ill., in 1924. The Adviser-Personnel Plan, as it was called, was "designed to provide educational, vocational, social, moral, and ethical guidance and counsel to all the students of the school." The teacher adviser was integral to helping each student reach his or her potential (Clerk, 1928).

Private schools traditionally have incorporated advisement into the duties of faculty members. Students, especially in boarding schools, are regularly assigned advisers to assist them with academic and personal decision making. Colleges and universities have assigned advisement responsibilities to faculty for many years.

The NASSP Model Schools Project

In 1969, NASSP and the Danforth Foundation initiated the Model Schools Project (MSP) under the leadership of J. Lloyd Trump, NASSP associate secretary for research and development. Basically, the 36 participating middle level, junior high, and senior high schools in the MSP were organized to know and assist students educationally as "total human beings." The MSP integrated advisement into the total operation of the school.

The MSP schools organized advisement clusters, with advisers, advisees, and counselors working in teams. On the average, one guidance counselor worked with 10–12 advisers and 300–360 students.

Teacher advisers met with their advisees each day to take attendance and alter the students' schedules as appropriate. They monitored their advisees in the continuous progress programs required of all students in each of eight or nine areas of knowledge.

The teacher advisers were the first line of defense in the school's guidance program designed to help each student succeed academically. Guidance counselors served as advisers for the teacher advisers and modeled good advisement practices as they worked with a given cluster.

Two other major reform efforts in the 1970s—I/D/E/A's Individually Guided Education (IGE) and the Reform in Secondary Education Project in California—also included teacher-adviser components. IGE began at the elementary level as a means of "teaching children one at a time, together" and embraced such innovative practices as team teaching, nongraded curriculum, continuous progress, and peer group instruction (Holzman, 1972). When IGE extended to the secondary level, teacher advisement was added.

The California Project was initiated at the secondary level in open plan schools. Student advisement was captured under the rubric of advisership (Clay, 1977).

A Rationale for Advisement

Secondary schools can be improved by focusing on individual students. Typically, among the secondary school's support staff are one or more counselors specifically trained to deliver guidance services to the entire student body. One counselor may advise 250–600 students, which frequently precludes any meaningful interaction. Each student needs individual contact and attention on school matters, but under the traditional arrangement, it is unlikely that anything other than a cursory meeting between the professional counselor and the student can occur.

Many students see the guidance counselor only in group meetings—rarely, one-to-one. Consequently, for many students, important questions go unanswered or are posed to less knowledgeable staff members.

Because all students have academic needs, some form of reorganization should be considered to afford each student an opportunity to learn and develop to his or her potential. Advisement helps provide this opportunity.

Chapter Two

The Goals and Objectives of Advisement

Effective secondary schools are committed to providing successful learning opportunities for all students according to their needs, interests, backgrounds, and aspirations. In this context, guidance is seen as the responsibility of all professionals and is organized accordingly.

The concept of the guidance team replaces the traditional notion of the guidance department. Optimally the team is composed of professional counselors, a speech pathologist, a school psychologist, a school nurse, clerical assistants, and teacher advisers, but realistically, the team's composition is smaller.

The teacher adviser's responsibilities include:

1. Monitoring the academic progress of each student advisee to provide reinforcement, support, intervention, and help at appropriate times
2. Providing each student with an adult advocate who knows him or her personally and who will help him or her examine options and make responsible choices
3. Helping plan programs of study that are based on the needs, interests, backgrounds, and aspirations of each student
4. Establishing a system of in-school communication wherein all professionals concerned with a student have systematic and consistent information to help the student succeed academically
5. Suggesting study techniques to each student for improving classwork and homework.

These general goals can be translated into several specific objectives that can give direction for establishing, evaluating, and refining an advisement program.

1. Salient information is collected about each student from a variety of sources and used to develop individual educational plans.
2. All students are helped to develop career goals consistent with their talents and interests and based on a clear knowledge of economic and societal trends.
3. All students are helped to plan a program of studies in accordance with their goals, aspirations, strengths, and weaknesses.
4. The progress of students in academic areas that they take for credit is monitored on a regular basis by an adult who knows them well and who can help them make necessary adjustments.

5. A communication network is established among the teachers to share information that will help provide effective learning environments for the student.
6. The parents of all students are contacted on a regular basis by someone who knows their child's schoolwork well enough to provide information about the student's progress.
7. A system is established for continually evaluating the success of each student and used to make changes as appropriate.
8. All students have someone in the school with whom they can talk and who can arrange help for them from more qualified persons when needed.
9. Potential student problems are handled in practical ways and before the fact, rather than in the aftermath of incidents.
10. Accurate and comprehensive information on all students is reported to colleges and universities, armed services, and other appropriate agencies.

These 10 objectives can give vision to a successful advisement program for a middle level or secondary school. Some objectives may appear more suited to a high school or a middle school. Appropriateness may, in fact, be more a matter of degree or intensity rather than related to the level of schooling. In much the same way that subject matter can be considered developmental, so can the objectives of advisement.

Chapter Three

The Need for Advisement

All humans share a common set of basic physiological and psychological needs that must be met within the context of society's institutions. The family is the key institution for meeting these needs; for a growing number of students, the school runs a close second. William Glasser (1986) proposes that everyone, regardless of station in life, is destined to fulfill five basic needs: survival, belonging, power, freedom, and fun. In his book, *Control Theory in the Classroom*, he contends that to the degree that these basic needs are adequately met, people become good citizens and productive workers.

When we successfully meet one or more of these needs, we perceive the experiences and the events surrounding the experience positively and file them away in "picture albums" of desirable activities—what Glasser calls our "all I want world." The activities or experiences are wanted because they have successfully met a need in the past and will probably do so in the future.

Given this theory, school—and the myriad experiences within the school—take on different meanings for different students. Stated simply, students who see school as a place where most of their needs are met judge school to be a good place. Students who find school unappealing either drop out, choose a variety of irresponsible behaviors, or do just enough to get by.

The physiological need for survival is probably met more easily in today's world than the psychological needs. How can more students meet the basic psychological needs of belonging, power, freedom, and fun in the school setting? The answer is not a simple one.

The school has become a complex place with increased demands, requirements, and options, and society has become more competitive for college entrance and skilled jobs. If we really want students to be successful in school and in life, then the experiences that make up schooling must help meet each student's basic needs. It is in this context that advisement becomes a viable strategy.

- *Belonging* means that students feel they are part of the school. They are "dues-paying members" and have a reason to belong. When students believe that someone in school cares about them and wants them to succeed, they feel they belong.
- *Power* is tied to achievement and the recognition that comes with it.

When students succeed in academic classes or in student activities, they satisfy their need for power. If they do not succeed in these areas, they look for other ways to satisfy this need.

- When students have a chance to make decisions, their need for *freedom* is met. Having a say about what is done in school satisfies this need. Unfortunately, options are not available to many students; from first bell to last, they are told what to do.
- *Fun* is a favorite need because it makes so much sense. Humor is something that none of us can live without. Good teachers make their classes interesting and enjoyable. When students are learning—even when the work is difficult—they will tell you they are having fun. Students also say the best teachers make learning fun. School does not have to be drudgery; we all work harder when we enjoy what we are doing.

An advisement program meets all these needs on a daily basis. Students BELONG to an advisory group. They gain POWER by their relationship with a teacher adviser who knows them as “total human beings.” They gain FREEDOM as they work with their adviser to plan their academic program and schedule. They have FUN in advisory group activities.

As a school satisfies basic student needs, it reduces the likelihood of disruption, disorder, and dropouts. The more teachers that serve as advisers, the more these relationships spill over into the regular classrooms so the entire school climate is positively influenced.

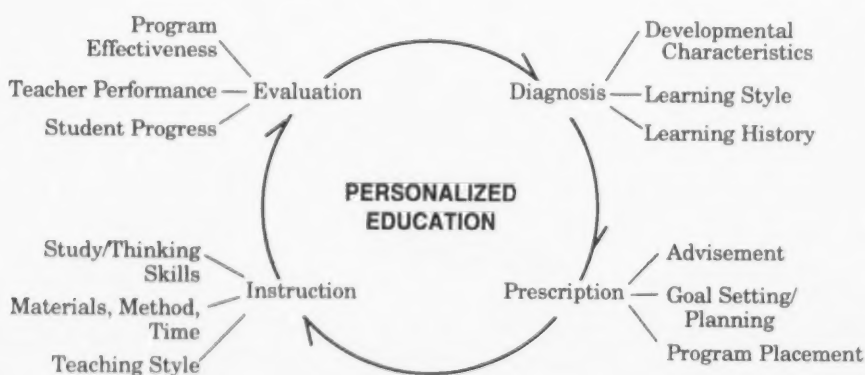
Chapter Four

Personalized Education

Successful secondary schools provide individual learning opportunities for students according to their abilities and interests, and in the process satisfy each of the basic psychological needs. This process has often been incorrectly labeled as "individualized education" or "individualized learning," but it is more accurately described by James W. Keefe, director of research for the National Association of Secondary School Principals, as "personalized education." Keefe's (1989) explanation clearly shows the relationship of advisement to optimal student learning. He defines personalized education as tailoring the learning environment to the characteristics of individual students. This approach to schooling acknowledges that students differ in the knowledge they bring to school, how they acquired that knowledge, and how they utilize what they know. It is both an attitude and an instructional procedure.

As an attitude, it is grounded in the belief that "learners are unique, and hence variable, and by varying instruction, learning outcomes can be held constant" (Keefe, 1983). As an instructional procedure, it includes the broad activities of diagnosis, prescription, instruction, and evaluation (DPIE). The personalized education model was developed by Keefe in the mid-1970s and has been revised several times to include 12 working components.

Model of Personalized Education



- *Diagnosis* addresses student developmental characteristics, previous learning history, and current learning style. The term is often avoided because it seems to imply a complex and arduous task. Yet it is a familiar activity in schools everywhere, implicit in such phases as "Her problem is . . ." and "What he really needs is . . ." Its most pernicious use places students in categories such as non-reader, slow learner, hyperactive, remedial. In its best form, it finds ways to help students learn and succeed in school.
- *Prescription* is concerned with *advisement*, goal setting/planning, and program placement: good activities in their own right but most effective when personalized. Physicians use prescriptions to cure people, but they work with individuals and do not prescribe the same treatment for everyone.
- *Instruction* embraces teaching styles, teaching methods, time use, study, and thinking skills. Some research shows that teachers instruct the way they prefer to learn or in accordance with the evaluation system in effect in the school district. Either way, only certain students benefit. Human variability requires that teachers consider the interactions of methodology with student characteristics and the best use of available time.
- *Evaluation* looks at student achievement, teacher performance, and program quality. Student evaluation uses a variety of measures of authentic achievement that guide the next steps with individual students. When the results are not as expected, perceptive teachers look for a better way.

The role of teacher adviser takes on its most significant meaning in this context. The advisers, working with a prescribed number of students, systematically collect and use information about individual advisees to help them plan appropriate programs of studies, to monitor their academic progress, and to suggest study techniques for improving their classwork and homework. The personalization of education is furthered by dividing the school into advisory groups and encouraging each adviser to know his or her advisees as complete individuals.

Chapter Five

The Ingredients

Four major areas define advisement and represent the key activities of teacher advisers: adviser-advisee relationships, adviser-staff interactions, adviser-parent contacts, and advisory group activities.

■ *Adviser-Advisee Relationships*

The heart of any good advisement program is the one-to-one relationship the teacher adviser develops with each advisee. This relationship is engendered and developed best by regular individual conferences between the adviser and the advisee.

If the teacher adviser is to be the one adult in the school who knows the advisee best, then sufficient time must be devoted to one-to-one meetings; providing the equivalent of one class period per month to each advisee is a useful rule of thumb. The one class period per month may be prorated into periods of shorter time or may be shared with students in pairs or small groups. The adviser must come to know the advisees well and gather information that affects their academic performance. A major source of this information is the advisees themselves.

One-to-one advisement conferences include evaluating academic progress, reviewing and interpreting test scores, updating schedules, reminding advisees of deadlines and obligations, developing academic plans, selecting courses, listening to school-related and personal problems, reviewing report cards, and getting to know one another.

The individual conference gives each student in the school his or her place in the spotlight at least once a month. It provides an opportunity for the advisee to be heard and for the adviser to become better informed about the advisee.

■ *Adviser-Staff Interactions*

For optimum value, the information that the adviser collects about each advisee must relate to the instructional system. In turn, the adviser must know how a student is progressing in each subject. This information must be communicated to the adviser via more than just letter grades or deficiency notices. The adviser, working with the classroom teachers of specific advisees, can head off problems before they arise or get out of hand.

Advisers are advocates for each advisee. They look for the good and praise it. They support advisees with their classroom teachers. Their relationships with other faculty members focus on helping teachers find successful ways to help students learn.

Administrators and counselors often involve the adviser before any disciplinary action is taken. An adviser, knowing that the student has been trying to improve, can give important information to the principal, assistant principal, and/or dean about the progress without excusing the infraction.

In a few schools, teacher advisers handle all routine discipline problems. In these schools, disciplinary procedures are based on the premise that the person who knows the most about the student is in a better position to invoke consequences that are best for both the school and the student.

As part of the guidance team, the adviser works closely with professional counselors and others. Advisees' problems that are beyond the realm of the adviser's expertise are referred to the school counselor and/or the school psychologist. Depending on the seriousness of the problems, the counselor or the school psychologist may refer the student to a community resource, thus extending the helping network outside the school.

School counselors work closely with advisers to provide them with help and advice. They even see individual advisees as needs arise. In addition, advisers may meet once a month with the school counselors to review their progress as advisers.

Counselors or school psychologists also help advisers interpret test scores and plan staff development activities.

■ *Adviser-Parent Contacts*

Advisers are the key contact between home and school. Parents call them first when a problem exists or when information is needed. Advisers arrange for conferences between parents and teachers. They answer parents' questions about any aspect of the school program. It is not uncommon during annual course registration for advisers to meet with advisees and their parents to select courses for the succeeding year.

Advisers contact parents early in the school year and maintain the contact throughout their involvement with advisees. In some schools the initial contact is by telephone; in others it is an evening meeting planned by the advisees for their parents; in still others it is a formal conference or a home visit.

Advisers should meet with parents once during each grading period to discuss student progress. If a meeting is not feasible, then some other kind of contact may suffice.

The bond between home and school is strengthened when advisers act on the assumption that contacting parents with good news is as important, if not more so, as when a student is having difficulty.

Parents are an important resource in working with students. They can provide additional information to explain difficulties a student might be having or offer insights and suggestions for teaching a student differently.

Through the advisement process, parents are informed of their student's long-range programs of study and their current schedules. They are often contacted by the adviser when disciplinary action is being considered.

■ Advisement Programs

Calling home to report a student absent can frequently turn a potentially negative situation into a positive one. Far too frequently, schools notify parents about an absence via a telephone call from a clerk, a form letter, a machine, or not at all. When advisers call home to inquire about how an advisee is feeling and whether they can get the assignments for the day, it is difficult for the parents and the advisee not to perceive the school in a positive vein.

■ *Advisory Group Activities*

Advisement is most usefully focused on individual advisees and their progress, but activities with the advisory group as a whole are also valuable. Many schools, especially at the middle level, conduct regular advisory group activities that focus on school adjustment, study skills, self-knowledge, and self-esteem.

The extension of these activities into the high school is illustrated in the Florida Teachers-as-Advisers Program and the Coalition of Essential Schools. Advisory groups learn about career options, college placement and credentials, and test interpretation. In the NASSP Model Schools Project (1969-74), advisory group activities included camping excursions, field trips to ball games, bowling, horseback riding, and cook outs.

The basic need for belonging is so prominent in students' lives that it seems foolish not to capitalize on any and all opportunities where it can be satisfied. Encouraging and planning group activities for advisory groups makes sense as long as the focus remains on the individual student. When advisory group activities are also a source of community service, both the students and the community benefit.

One caution: Advisement is not group guidance and should not be so implemented. Advisers are not trained counselors and should not be viewed as such. If a group activity requires some type of special training or if the teacher adviser perceives the activity as another preparation, it is better done by someone who has the training and the time to do it.

Chapter Six

The Logistics of Advisement

O rganization of advisement programs differs from school to school. The ingredients of an effective advisement program remain constant, but ample room exists for variability in implementation.

■ *Assignment of Students*

Students can be assigned to their adviser in various ways. Usually, advisers are assigned to the same advisory group for an extended period so that they can get to know their advisees better. A few middle schools, however, change advisory groups each year. The advisees remain on the same advisement team but change advisers. Continuity is achieved by teachers communicating effectively across grade levels.

Some schools assign students by grade level, while others use some form of multi-age grouping. Either approach is defensible.

Grade level assignment allows the guidance team to identify topics germane to the grade level and to present this information.

A multi-age arrangement makes it possible for older students to take responsibility for helping younger students.

Many schools assign students to advisers randomly or alphabetically. Some even allow students to choose their own adviser, on the premise that students who are to spend considerable time with an adult adviser should have a say in the matter.

Some provision for changing advisers should be built into the system, but students should not be allowed to change advisers capriciously. An orderly system for making changes can be established through the school counselor or administrator. No student or adviser actually wants to spend an extended period in a close relationship with someone with whom they are totally incompatible. Fortunately, few changes need to be made.

A limited number of students should be assigned to an adviser to enable the adviser to get to know the advisees well and to meet with them on a one-to-one basis at least once a month. An adviser-advisee ratio of 15–18 students to one adviser is manageable. Smaller ratios are more desirable; 22–25 students are workable in some situations. The idea is to serve individual students.

■ *Who Should Advise*

Smaller adviser-advisee ratios can be achieved by having *all* professionals in the school serve as advisers, with the sole exception of the counselors who

■ Advisement Programs

serve as "advisers to the advisers."

All professionals have experiences that qualify them to be advisers. Advisement does not require special credentials; it requires caring adults who have positive attitudes toward working with individual students.

A positive attitude is probably the most important characteristic of an adviser. Believing in the worth and dignity of each advisee and the value of the program go a long way to help an adviser be successful. Principals, as instructional leaders, can serve as models for others by taking a group of advisees themselves.

Counselors should not serve as regular advisers, unless it is to work with a few students who are having difficulty adjusting to school. Counselor's advisory groups can be created by referrals from advisers who have not been successful in helping the students.

In a few schools, other staff members serve as advisers. Although no hard and fast rule applies, care should be taken with these persons. Be sure they are aware of the responsibilities of advisement and, like their teacher counterparts, possess the appropriate attitudes for the assignment.

■ *Scheduling*

When students meet with advisees is important. If individual conferences are expected, and they should be, time must be provided in the adviser's and advisee's schedules. It is unreasonable to expect teachers to confer with students before or after school.

Providing time during the school day offers tangible evidence that individual conferences are valued. As a general rule, teacher advisers need about five hours per week to devote to their advisement duties (including individual conferences with their advisees).

Many schools schedule an advisory group period each day and ask the advisers to use part of that time to meet with advisees one-to-one. Simple propinquity can promote the adviser-advisee relationship. The daily period ensures that advisers see advisees frequently and are aware when any are absent. These daily meetings can range in length from 5 to 30 minutes.

Schools that emphasize individual conferences often hold a five-minute check-in period each morning to take roll, make schedule adjustments, and schedule conferences. Schools that give more emphasis to group activities schedule an extended advisory period once or twice a month to present information of importance to the advisees.

More and more schools are scheduling the advisory period adjacent to lunch to allow more flexible use of the time. Advisers can schedule individual meetings with advisees while the remainder of the group is constructively engaged. The group may choose to eat lunch together.

The Shoreham-Wading River Middle School in Shoreham, N. Y., schedules 67 minutes each day for advisement. This time is used for individual conferences three days per week, group meetings every day, and a daily advisory lunch. Time to advise is specifically provided in the school's

nine-period day (Burkhardt and Fusco, 1984).

Many high schools have instituted a seven-period day plus an advisory period. Teachers teach five periods of the seven and have one period for advisement and one for planning. Advisers use the advisement period to meet with students, confer with teachers, call parents, and update and review records. Finding advisement time in a traditional six-period day is a bit more difficult, but not impossible.

Regardless of how advisement is scheduled, it must be perceived by students and advisers as valuable. If the tasks are not important, the program can deteriorate into a social period and will soon come under heavy criticism from parents and students.

■ *Roles*

High school advisement programs are best organized by clusters with a counselor guiding 10–12 teacher advisers. The clusters can be arranged by grade levels or across grades depending on preference. The cluster system breaks down the bigness of larger schools and provides for easy communication between counselors and advisers.

Many middle schools and some high schools utilize a team approach. If a school is organized instructionally by teams, the team organization can be expanded to include advisement by assigning a counselor to the team and advisement responsibilities to each team member. When the team meets, the members can discuss individual students and how to provide appropriate learning environments.

The principal and other administrators support the advisement program in a variety of ways:

- Taking on the advisement responsibility or sharing the responsibility with a faculty member.
- Building a master schedule that provides time to advise.
- Meeting with a steering committee of advisers or simply a representative sample of advisers to listen to their ideas for improving the program.
- Finding space where advisers can meet one-on-one with advisees.

School counselors develop a guidance curriculum with essential learnings for all students. These essential learnings are presented in a sequence, usually by grade level and delivered in large-group sessions. Outside speakers or technical assistance can also be used. The purpose is to provide students with information crucial to their developmental needs in an academic setting.

Ninth grade advisees, for example, might attend large-group presentations on orientation, community service, planning for the future, and understanding learning style. Small-group reaction sessions led by members of the guidance team can follow to give students an opportunity to ask questions and gain clarification. Teacher advisers then work with individual advisees in greater depth in each of the areas.

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Counselors also serve as advisers to advisers and provide both formal and informal inservice activities. The formal activities are scheduled within the cluster or team of advisers; the informal activities grow out of conversations and conferences between an adviser and a counselor. Teacher advisers learn to value individual conferences more when counselors model appropriate behavior.

■ *Inservice*

Formal inservice, usually provided by counselors, usually focuses on information and skills advisers need to do their jobs. For example, advisers need to know something about the total school curriculum if they are to assist advisees with program placement and academic progress.

In the context of a personalized approach to instruction, for example, knowing about learning style and its implications for instruction and advisement is critical. Learning style is a relatively new concept in education that has great promise for helping individual students. Knowing how advisees learn and how they like to learn can provide advisers with important cues to advisee behavior.

The NASSP Learning Style Profile is a comprehensive instrument that lends itself nicely to a diagnostic-prescriptive approach. Individual profiles can be used to help students plan for classroom and home study. Advisers who understand style can also assist advisee's teachers to plan appropriate instructional environments.

Other inservice components may focus on helping students plan, interpreting standardized achievement tests, and developing "conferencing" strategies for meeting advisees and parents. Many schools provide formal training for advisers in listening and communicating skills.

A handbook developed expressly for advisement can provide advisers with ready reference about state and local job requirements, college entrance information, and career trends. Such a handbook is best when developed with faculty input and updated as needed.

A number of schools' handbooks also include a variety of activities and experiences for use with advisory groups. This type of handbook is more often found at the middle level. If specific activities are required as part of the advisement program, advisers should have an opportunity to receive training in their use.

■ *Record Keeping*

A certain amount of paperwork is necessary for effective advisement, but it should be ancillary to advisement and not the driving force.

The records maintained by advisers must advance the goal of individual student academic progress. Achievement test scores, class grades, other records of academic progress, and learning style profiles are basic to the advisement process. These records are usually placed in some type of confidential advisee folder or dossier. Key points discussed during individual conferences are also recorded and placed in the file, as are notes

about meetings and contacts with parents.

Background information about each advisee is useful in making home contacts. Planning documents to help advisees set goals for achievement are also helpful. Records of contacts with teachers and discussions with counselors about individual advisees add to a comprehensive portrait of an advisee.

Written folders will probably soon be replaced in most schools by computerized records networked to a master file of information about advisees. (Student academic credentials can also be computerized for future employers or college admissions officers.)

Electronic credential-building gives the adviser and the advisee the flexibility of revising the materials over the course of a student's school career. This process also helps students see the connection between what they do in school and the expanded reality of the world outside.

Chapter Seven

Exemplary Programs

The following are exemplary school advisement programs. In each case, the program focuses on individual students and ways to help them succeed in school. The programs are not new; they have generally been operational for several years and have been developed through a careful process of evaluation and refinement.

Middle Level Schools

❖ Shoreham-Wading River Middle School

Randall Road

Shoreham, New York 11786-9745

Principal: Cary Bell

This program, as described by Winifred Prado, administrative assistant, has been in existence since 1971. It was described in Turning Points (1989), as an example of effective advisement at the middle level.

When Shoreham-Wading River Middle School began in 1971, it was organized on an advisory system. The advisory system helps implement the school's mission to know each student personally, to be humane and sensitive, and to nurture the student emotionally and socially as well as academically.

Experience has verified the belief that students learn best in a supportive environment. At the Shoreham-Wading River Middle School, it is almost impossible for a student to "fall between the cracks."

The school is divided into small advisory groups of approximately 10 students each. All teachers and most administrators serve as advisers. Such is the importance of advisement that considerable time is allocated for it.

The advisory group gathers for 12 minutes each morning in place of the traditional homeroom. At lunchtime, advisees meet in the adviser's room to have lunch together, replacing the large-group arrangement of a cafeteria. Four days each week, the first period is devoted to advisory.

The district provides an early bus run on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays so advisers have the luxury of individual 40-minute conferences with one or perhaps two advisees at a time. (The remaining students remain at home until the regular bus run or come in first period to practice with one of the music groups.) On Fridays, the four or five advisers of a particular team meet to discuss their students.

Advisory groups are heterogeneous and include both special education and non-classified students. In sixth grade, heterogeneous self-contained classes are teamed in pairs. Two classroom teachers, along with two or three co-advisers from other disciplines, form an advisory team for 40–50 students and divide them into four or five advisory groups.

At the end of sixth grade, these advisers personally place their students in seventh grade advisories in the same wing; seventh grade advisers do the same for their students as they move to the eighth grade in their wing.

An adviser's responsibility is to know each student and his or her family, interests, strengths, weaknesses, and day-to-day experiences. Individual conferences are simply conversations geared to this purpose and require no formal structure or agenda. The two daily group advisories likewise involve conversation, discussion of things that happen during the day in or out of school, and sometimes just relaxation and fun.

Advisers and their advisees plan a variety of additional activities, such as pizza lunches, birthday parties, trips to movies, concerts, or ball games, skits for the school variety show, and food drives for the needy. Discussions often focus on student interactions, including "put-downs," anger, victimization, problems in class, homework or tests that "bunch up," and the like. Most discussion is generated by the group.

A portion of the fall open house night is set aside for advisee parents to meet with advisers. All report card grades and other information funnel from teachers to the adviser, who prepares report cards and holds parent conferences during the two days each year set aside for this purpose. Calls from or to parents are routinely handled by advisers.

Class teachers generally go to a student's adviser first about issues of concern; i.e., consistently missed homework, tension with another student, the possibility of a crisis in the home, etc. The adviser's relationship with the student is such that he or she quickly discerns the pattern, speaks with the student and/or parent, asks the guidance counselor for advice or help, meets with students as needed, or perhaps calls on the Child Study Team or another resource.

The atmosphere in the school is warm, lively, and appropriate for early adolescents, yet disciplined. There is little graffiti or vandalism. Students are sent to administrators only in the rare instance of repeated or extreme misbehavior. Students generally love the school; attendance is high and achievement notable in the arts, academics, music, sports, and service to the community.

Much of this positive climate is attributable to the advisory system and to the staff's commitment to know and love their students at this special stage in their development.

- ❖ Cross Keys Middle School
14205 Cougar Drive
Florissant, Missouri 63033
Principal: Delores Graham

This program, described by Mary Louise Hawkins, a staff member at the school, is an outgrowth of the work on advisement begun in the Ferguson-Florissant School District in the early 1970s.

Advisement programs may be unsuccessful because they are based on the wrong idea. Some educators think advisement should occur only in groups, when it really should happen in one-to-one conferences—individually.

It is easy to speculate why advisement planners make this mistake. Educators tend to think of students in groups. We treat them in groups, we feed them in groups, and we teach them in groups. It is not surprising, then, that advisement is often scheduled in a group framework. Yet, if we agree that the purpose of advisement is to develop a relationship with each student, it makes perfect sense that it occur when an adviser and an advisee meet alone.

At Cross Keys Middle School in suburban St. Louis, the advisement program is totally individual. This means we avoid having food drives and candy sales, punching green tickets, forming circles, electing officers, raffling turkeys, and the other things advisers are sometimes heir to. We do find common ground with students and have dialogs: long talks, short talks, some paperwork, some tasks. All activity is initiated to allow a relationship to develop and flourish.

Group advisement fails for three reasons:

1. Skill is needed to run effective group activities. One cannot expect all teachers to have this essential skill. The program must be designed so every teacher has the skills necessary to be successful.
2. A program that is group-oriented will, of necessity, include activities that are determined by the school or by the adviser. Yet, the content of advisement should be determined by the individual students' current needs. Schoolwide concerns should be included in the instructional program. Peer pressure reversal and conflict resolution, for example, are "subjects" that should be taught within the instructional program. These needs, no matter how pressing, should not infringe on the conference time of advisers and advisees.
3. Students do not value group activities that are not of their own making or concern. Their cooperation in "advisory" must be bought—refreshments, contests, games, and other tricks from the large bag in our teaching closets. What is more, we cannot love them to death in groups. Personal concern expressed in an inappropriate setting seems insincere, and often is.

At Cross Keys Middle School we have achieved a delicate balance between real tasks that adviser and advisees do and effective interactions that serve individual students' needs for adult listeners.

We use the Learning Style Inventory as a profitable advisement task for seventh graders and their advisers, and IDEAS, a new career interest survey, for eighth graders. We plan to discuss these individual survey results in parent conferences to rather than grades and discipline, which often bring only negative reactions.

We have had a difficult time convincing our staff of efficient planners that

the instruments should be given individually. (So much time can be conserved by administering them in groups.) But we are making progress. The conversation, explanation, and dialog that occur while the student fills out the survey can form the basis of a relationship.

Advisement tasks are meaningful to both parties, can be done individually, and stimulate talk. Program planning, record keeping, and test interpretation are also suitable "talk generators," as long as advisers do not turn them into paperwork.

It is difficult to measure advisement effects, but we routinely monitor the health of the organization through student feedback, faculty committee work, and team discussions.

❖ Tyrone Middle School
6421-22 Avenue North
St. Petersburg, Florida 33710
Principal: Mike Miller
Coordinator: Paula Nelson

This school is 1 of 135 middle schools in Florida participating in a state-funded advisement program. It serves as a model school for 14 pilot schools. The advisement program is described by Paula Nelson.

Tyrone Middle School, located in St. Petersburg, Fla., has a student population of 940. The students come from a variety of socioeconomic levels. Approximately 50 percent of the students are on free/reduced lunch and 55 percent are bused.

Tyrone's advisory program—Students and Teachers Advance Together at Tyrone (STATT)—began in the fall of 1989. We were awarded a state grant and assigned a pilot status for one and one-half years. The school became a model for the state in January 1990. We currently assist 15 middle schools within the state with their advisement programs.

All teachers (core curriculum, special education, related arts) have an advisory group of approximately 20 students. Even our cafeteria manager serves as an adviser. Teacher advisers meet with their advisees for 20 minutes at the beginning of each day. No announcements are made and no official attendance is taken during advisement to protect the importance of the program; all such business is conducted at the beginning of the first period.

The faculty decided to hold STATT first thing in the morning to provide students with early contact with a "friend/adviser." Many problems that originate at the bus stop or on the bus tend to escalate throughout the day. STATT allows teachers to defuse these problems and head off potential conflicts that may occur later in the day. (Our referral count dropped 58 percent the first year of advisement and continued to drop an additional 11 percent the following year.)

The counselors at Tyrone have developed a schedule that allows them to rotate into each advisory group in their grade levels every Wednesday to conduct an activity with the students and the adviser. This contact provides a

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great opportunity for counselors to meet with all the students on a regular basis.

Tyrone, with two other schools in the county, developed a county curriculum for advisement. These materials served as a resource to advisers. The most successful advisers, however, put the books away long ago and replaced them with individual conferences, focused activities, "rap sessions," and social events.

Activities like these elicit positive responses in middle school students and establish positive bonds between advisers and advisees.

One very successful project undertaken during STATT has been community service. The American Red Cross helped our school serve several area nursing homes during the holidays. The students decorated placemats and tray favors for the residents. Other schoolwide projects and contests have been extremely successful in bringing students and teachers together.

Report cards are distributed every six weeks during STATT. Many advisers spend one or two days prior to report card day discussing with the students how they should approach a teacher if they have a question regarding a grade or comment. Standardized testing is also done during STATT.

The advisement group provides a warm, caring atmosphere that has proven to be a positive and stress-free environment for testing. Students actually have asked for "more testing"!

Advisement can be a difficult program to sustain. Although our successes far outweigh our problems, we are still in the process of changing at Tyrone. The advisement program is not a time to complete the curriculum; nor is it a time for psychoanalysis or intense counseling. It is a time to develop a much-needed relationship with a student. It may often be the only personal attention that student receives.

High Schools

❖ McCluer North High School

705 Waterford Drive

Florissant, Missouri 63033

Principal: Larry D. Kreyling

The advisement program at McCluer is a nationally-validated model developed under the auspices of the U.S. Office of Education and described by its principal, Larry Kreyling.

The advisement program at McCluer North was begun during the 1971-72 school year, coinciding with the opening of a new high school. It was established to offer students assistance in developing programs of study that would fit their own needs rather than forcing them to fit the existing program.

The curriculum also needed the advisement system. Our courses were designed on the assumption that students would find schedules that were exactly right for them. Advisement functions as the primary means by which the school responds to its students—personally, systematically, and purposefully.

A contributing factor to the success of the current advisement program is a staff that cares a great deal about the students as human beings, believes in their essential goodness, and trusts them. Each staff member, including administrators, is an adviser for approximately 16 students. All, regardless of their special roles, attempt to relate to students and parents on a personal basis. Our common commitment ensures that all persons and groups share responsibility for advisement's successful operation.

Ideally, students and parents should choose the adviser they believe understands them best and can give the help they need. During the registration period, prior to entering high school, eighth grade students and parents are asked to name an adviser they prefer. Many students were able to request advisers based on other siblings' experiences or by recommendations from other families or students.

Those students not able to identify a specific adviser are asked to indicate criteria—sex, age, interests, or subject taught—that can be used for initial assignment by the registrar.

After students have completed a semester, they and their parents have an opportunity to request a change in adviser. A form is signed by the current adviser and by the one requested signifying that the new adviser is willing to accept another advisee. The records are then transferred.

The advisement system allows time for each adviser to meet individually or in group settings with advisees. Every adviser has two hours of released time weekly that is scheduled on a rotating basis for conducting personal conferences. In addition, advisement groups meet every Monday for 15 minutes between first and second periods for advisers to disseminate information to the entire group.

Several times during each year, especially at registration times, parents are invited to participate in conferences to help formulate plans and to be involved in the decision-making process.

The advisers have access to all materials needed to support their efforts: a working copy of the student's permanent record, including grade stickers, schedules, standardized test results, progress reports, interest surveys, etc. With these data, advisers are able to audit graduation requirements and keep their advisees focused on their goals.

Advisers use the school's curriculum guide and planning book along with information about colleges and careers from the adjacent counseling center. This contact with counseling resources and personnel is a form of ongoing inservice training.

Advisement teams can regularly request special assistance from guidance counselors and other personnel so each member of the team is confident in using the available resources.

Once goals for advisement are clearly defined, specific tasks and activities are identified and categorized as follows:

1. Program planning—Assisting students in selecting courses, evaluating courses, and developing a long-range plan.

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2. School offerings—Increasing student awareness of school programs, services, operations.
3. Self-assessment—Helping students understand their own behavior, identifying strengths and weaknesses, and setting goals.
4. Parent relations/conferences—Increasing parent participation in educational and career planning for their children.
5. School/community issues—Helping members of the school community understand and solve problems; i.e., vandalism, racial relations, etc.
6. Feedback/evaluation—Collecting information about the school, formally and informally, that can be used to improve programs and operations.
7. Career planning/preparation—Assisting students in exploring career options and in preparing for careers.
8. Decision making—Applying the principles of sound decision making to the tasks of advisement.

Some major adjustments must be made for advisement. The role of the professional counselor must be redefined in a way that complements the advisement system. Counselors no longer need to spend the major portion of their time working with large numbers of students. They now have the opportunity to use their special training to serve a variety of needs and to be facilitators for the advisement system. Since they are advisers themselves, they assume ownership and benefit from the information-sharing that goes on between all colleagues.

With advisement, the school's goals belong to everyone; they are not formulated by some higher, mysterious authority. When everyone respects the school's goals, philosophy, and priorities, and focuses on improving human relations and finding success for every student, the total school environment can be significantly improved.

♦ Wilde Lake High School
4560 Trumpeter Road
Columbia, Maryland 21044
Principal: Bonnie Daniel
Adviser Coordinator: Eric Ebersole

Advisement has been part of this school since its opening in 1971, one of several innovative practices initiated simultaneously as part of the NASSP Model Schools Project. It is described by Bonnie Daniel, principal.

Wilde Lake High School's adviser program is a collaborative effort to facilitate positive interactions among all members of the school community—students, staff, and parents/guardians. The adviser program supports Wilde Lake's commitment to students and the development of their individual capabilities.

To enhance communication and training, the school is divided into three clusters, each with an administrator, a counselor, and a group of advisers. An adviser coordinator works with all parties. Cluster meetings are held five times a year.

All teachers except first-year teachers serve as advisers; first-year teachers are apprenticed to an experienced adviser for one year. Teachers are hired with the understanding that the adviser role is a required and highly important part of the position. Each adviser has approximately 20 advisees.

One teacher serves both as an adviser and as the adviser coordinator. The adviser coordinator has a daily planning period assigned to the administration of these duties:

- Maintain a calendar of events for adviser groups
- Coordinate the training program for advisers
- Act as an advocate and liaison for adviser groups with the administration
- Act as a public relations person for adviser groups
- Assist in cluster meeting planning with the counselors
- Coordinate the adviser selection process and handle change requests
- Design and implement activities for adviser groups
- Participate in the ongoing evaluation of the adviser program.

Ninth graders are given the opportunity to select an adviser, but the majority of students are randomly assigned to advisers. At the end of the ninth grade and again at the end of the tenth grade, students may request a different adviser if the adviser-advisee match is not satisfactory. In rare cases, and only with the approval of the administrative team, are adviser changes made in the junior and senior years.

Adviser groups meet daily for 25 minutes between first and second periods. Meeting times are basically informal except on Wednesday, when the adviser coordinator provides a group activity. (Some activities are optional while others are mandatory.)

On the other days of the week, advisees are engaged in many activities such as homework, conversation, group breakfasts, conferences with the adviser, meetings with counselors, meetings with college representatives, and class meetings.

Adviser group time is shortened to accommodate testing or delayed school openings and lengthened to accommodate assemblies.

The adviser has three primary responsibilities: to develop an in-depth knowledge of each advisee, to provide academic advisement, and to act as the advisee's advocate. In keeping with these responsibilities, each adviser has these specific duties:

- Maintain a folder for each advisee containing information for each academic year (personal data, copies of progress reports and report cards, copies of disciplinary referrals, excuses for absences, etc.)
- Submit quarterly reports to the cluster administrator
- Monitor and encourage academic progress
- Establish open communications with advisees' parents/guardians
- Work with advisees and their parents/guardians to develop plans for advisee growth, including course selection
- Encourage advisees to participate fully in the life of the school—both academic and cocurricular.

■ Advisement Programs

- ❖ New Trier Township High School
385 Winnetka Avenue
Winnetka, Illinois 60093
Principal: Dianna Lindsay

The nation's first secondary advisement program continues into the 1990s. It is described by Diane Juneau, Director of Student Services.

On any given morning, one can walk the halls of New Trier Township High School and observe a myriad of activities between 8:10 and 8:35, the official adviser period. Last October, for example, a group of sophomore girls clustered around a desk painting a clown's happy face on their adviser; in the next room, senior boys wrestled with the question of why they should register with the Selective Service when they turned 18; in yet another room an adviser talked quietly with one student as others labored over homework or drew figures on the blackboard.

All three scenes are representative of what occurs daily in the adviser room, the heart of New Trier's guidance system.

Developed in 1924 by a far-seeing superintendent who believed that classroom teachers who see students daily are the best counselors, the adviser system is an integral part of the New Trier educational program.

The adviser is a faculty member who accepts the adviser assignment as one-fifth of his/her teaching responsibility. (At any one time, approximately 40 percent of the faculty serve as advisers; all teacher candidates are interviewed as potential advisers.)

Meeting the advisory group of 24 students for 25 minutes each day, advisers develop a rapport with and a sense of responsibility for advisees and their personal and academic progress. When a student is experiencing difficulty of any kind, the adviser is the first person a parent or a faculty member will contact for information or advice. In general, the adviser serves as an adult role model and a resource person whose counsel and perspectives on individual students is highly valued.

Through a review of test scores, past academic performance, and individual levels of motivation, the adviser assists each student in planning an academic program suited to his or her ability and post-high school plans and a program of cocurricular activities designed for fun and exploration.

Because teacher advisers must be well-versed in all the academic and cocurricular offerings, the school as a whole gains an added benefit: faculty members, not isolated from the other academic disciplines, are well aware of and committed to the total school mission. Faculty collegiality is a wonderful offshoot of the adviser system!

Advisers communicate frequently with the parents of their advisees. In the freshman year, the adviser visits the homes of each advisee to set the tone for this four-year relationship. When an advisee is absent, the adviser calls home as soon as possible. When an advisee is experiencing problems,

adviser and parents—and often guidance support personnel—work together to support the student.

Communication is further enhanced through the parents association. Parent representatives from each adviser room plan social and educational activities, either for parents only or for parents and students. Programs are arranged for an individual adviser room, for a single class, or for the school as a whole. School administrators often tap parent association members for feedback on critical issues and for support of new projects.

Although adviser rooms are designed to be macrocosms—for students of all ability levels, with varying cocurricular interests, and from different communities—each room has a character of its own derived from the personality of the adviser and the synergy among advisees.

Through their four years together, advisees form new and lasting friendships and develop an appreciation for persons they otherwise might not meet. The personal growth observed in individual advisees is one of the silent rewards advisers receive as each group of advisees graduates.

As a guidance service, the adviser system cannot stand alone. Numerous professional support personnel—eight adviser chairmen who train advisers and serve as class deans, two deans, a team of college/career counselors, a staff of social workers, a psychologist, a consulting psychiatrist, a student assistance coordinator—augment the personalized help given by the adviser.

In a school of 2,700 students, the adviser room is an antidote to anonymity, a home away from home. It is a comfort for students to begin each day with a mentor in whom they can confide, and an advocate on whom they can rely for advice and support.

❖ St. Jerome's Catholic School
Box 810
Vermilion, Alberta, Canada T0B 4M0
Principal: R. Brady Long

This unique K-12 school instituted a personalized program of education in 1987 which included advisement for each elementary and high school student. Its present and future are described by the principal, Brady Long.

St. Jerome's motto is the "Raison d'Etre" for the existence of its advisement program: "Where Each Student Is Made in the Image of God and Therefore Is Unique." In April 1987, after input from the senior staff, we decided to develop a personalized high school using three modes of instructional delivery:

1. Learning centers, with fully trained teachers and instructional assistants
2. Distance education, using technology to bring courses from other schools with sufficient students and trained personnel to offer an experience
3. Off-campus vocational education courses; e.g., food preparation (local restaurant), related mechanics (local service station), beauty culture, etc.

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With such variety in instructional delivery, it was imperative that a common denominator be found. Hence, the need for advisement.

Our high school advisement program began in September 1988. Along with all our grade 9-12 teachers, I also have an advisee group. The only senior teacher exempted from advisement is our P.E. specialist. Each adviser has an instructional assistant as a partner. The average number of students per group is 15-18. Students choose their advisers and remain with them for four years. Changes can be made for the betterment of the student; for this to occur, parental involvement is recommended.

In September 1990, we began developing an advisement process for grades 6-8. We are still in the development stage, but our goal is to have a cross-graded grouping of students utilizing the same process as in our high school.

Grades K-5 are already operating an advisement program, restricted by grades. Our vision for September 1994 is to begin a 20-month program in which teachers remain with their group for two full years; i.e., K-1, 2-3, 4-5. This elementary program will lay the foundation for middle level advisement which, in turn, will prepare students for the high school program. At all levels, personalized learning is or will be in place.

Advisers meet with their groups at the beginning and end of each day for approximately 10 minutes. One of the major purposes for these daily meetings is to acclimatize the student to the realities of the work world—attendance, punctuality, effort, and cooperation.

In addition, each adviser meets his or her advisory group for one 40-minute period each week. During these sessions, the adviser and assistant discuss individually and, with the group when applicable, the five facets of a student's life: emotional, physical, social, academic, and spiritual.

The basis for much of the above relates directly to a compulsory high school course called Career and Life Management (CALM) which has six themes: Self-Management, Well-Being, Relationships, World of Work, Independent Living, and Sexuality. As principal, I have one 50-minute session per week with all grade 9-12 students. During this time, senior teachers meet to discuss and make decisions regarding a variety of topics.

Our major instrument for collecting individual learning data is the NASSP Learning Style Profile. Each adviser, assistant, and advisee have copies of the Profile to use in making informed decisions about school program and life choices. Because all our teachers are advisers, they receive the materials necessary to help advisees make informed decisions. Advisers recommend referral counseling only when problem(s) cannot be solved by the adviser and/or principal.

The most important measures of our success are the high rates of attendance, punctuality, effort, and cooperation shown at our daily and weekly sessions. More evaluation efforts are planned using an instrument developed by Alberta Education.

Chapter Eight

A Final Word

If the purpose of any school improvement is to increase the likelihood that more students will work hard, succeed academically, and find school a satisfying place to be, then advisement is a positive step. With the accent today upon restructuring our schools, it makes sense that concern for the individual student should guide our thinking.

No longer are students willing to work for rewards only at the end of the journey. They are much more focused on identity. They want to be recognized first for who they are and then for what they do. They find it extremely difficult to accept the adage that hard work brings (external) recognition. Their responses to school and to life emanate from an inner core of values unique to each individual.

As the population expands and schools become more impersonal, breaking down the bigness through some form of advisement can recognize students for who they are. When students feel comfortable about their worth, they are more apt to work hard. The teacher adviser, knowing students educationally as total human beings, is in the best position to help the school augment weaknesses, capitalize on interests, and adjust to differences.

When advisement is incorporated into a total school program, student achievement increases, attitudes toward school improve, and discipline problems decrease. The benefits of advisement can be summarized in terms of a two-way continuum with the advisee at one end and the adviser at the other. Benefit accrues to both parties along several important dimensions:

- *Advocacy:* That advisers are advocates for their students is obvious, but advisees also become advocates for their advisers. As advisees get to know their advisers, they make their worth known to the entire student body.
- *Community:* A spirit of community is generated when advisory groups work together on a project or join in a social activity. This spirit extends to the entire faculty when teachers see their role as helping others to work with students more effectively. The level of communication with parents is raised through conferences and other personal contacts. Parents begin to view themselves as genuine partners in the educational process.

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- *Personal growth:* Advisees learn more about themselves as they explore the results of achievement tests and instruments with their advisers in one-to-one conferences. Classroom teachers begin to see the wisdom in personalizing education when they work with advisees as individuals. They understand that a single approach to instruction cannot fit all students.
- *Information:* Students are more informed about graduation requirements and their status vis à vis those requirements. They also are more aware of their career goals and what it will take to attain them. Teacher advisers become more knowledgeable about the total school curriculum.

Annual evaluations of the Florida Teachers-as-Advisers program conducted by the Florida State Department of Education since 1985 show that dropout rates are lower in high schools with advisement programs. Student attitudes toward school are also positively affected. In addition, student schedule changes decrease (Jenkins, 1989).

There are many different ways to organize and deliver advisement. Local conditions may dictate some arrangements and overrule others. Programs are frequently known by different names, especially at the middle level. But regardless of location or label, one overriding theme prevails: "Advisement is getting to know a student well enough to know what is best for him or her" (Powell, Farrar, and Cohen, 1985). The implementation of an advisement program changes how a school operates.

The wise principal understands that lasting change takes time and requires understanding. In most cases, the evolution of the exemplary programs described here took 10–15 years. They stand as examples of what advisement is, and therefore can be, for all schools.

Appendix

The Teacher Adviser Handbook

Most schools with advisement programs develop a handbook to assist teacher advisers with their responsibilities. The contents of the handbooks vary from school to school and may contain different kinds of information depending on whether the school is a high school or middle level school. The following topics are taken from teacher adviser handbooks developed by schools in the Florida Teacher-as-Advisers program for high schools and a comparable middle level advisement project in the same state.

1. OVERVIEW AND ORGANIZATION. This section usually includes a general description of the advisement program and the manner in which the program is organized. The responsibilities of the teacher adviser and the guidance counselor are outlined, along with a statement about how the two roles complement each other. Many Florida schools also list a steering committee composed of teachers and administrators as part of the school's organization for advisement.

2. THE ADVISEMENT CALENDAR. A calendar is developed that carefully spells out what is to be accomplished during each month. Usually the school year begins with a check of each student's schedule and a review of long-range goals. At the high school level, the adviser and the advisee inspect and update the Four-Year-Plan Card. Parent contact is made by letter or telephone. At the middle level, a personal interview helps clarify summer accomplishments and new directions. Several get-acquainted group activities may be included. Activities coincide with events throughout the year that affect students' academic standing; e.g., testing, registration, and college application.

3. A SCOPE AND SEQUENCE BY GRADE LEVEL. Given the close working relationship between teacher adviser and counselor, a logical extension of the advisement calendar is a scope and sequence of guidance activities. The scope and sequence contains key outcomes for all students by grade levels. The sixth and ninth grade might focus, for example, on adjustment to a new school environment and the academic requirements for being a successful student. A profile of student characteristics might begin in the sixth grade with an assessment of learning style, and a reassessment as the student enters the first year of high school.

Study skills, career information, interpreting tests, and building academic credentials may all be included in a scope and sequence geared to the developmental needs of students at different grade levels.

■ Advisement Programs

4. **PERSONAL FOLDERS AND CONTENTS.** This section describes the information to be recorded in individual dossiers for each advisee. Generally, the dossier begins with a personal data sheet and includes materials on test results, course selection, proficiency/deficiency notices, key outcomes of individual conferences, contacts with parents, goal statements, a three or four-year-plan card, and awards and other recognitions received by the advisee. Each of these entries is described, along with instructions on how to update the folder.

Spruce Creek High School in Port Orange, Fla., calls this material *The Academic Package*, and includes the advisee's report card, schedule, personal data sheet, cumulative academic record, four-year plan, and mid-quarter grade report.

5. **PROMOTION AND GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS.** Most school districts have what is called a "pupil progression plan" that describes how a student advances from one grade level to the next. A teacher adviser must be well-versed in these promotional plans. This information is discussed with advisees and used to monitor the advisee's academic progress in school.

6. **PLANNING.** One of the key roles of advisement is helping a student prepare for the future by setting directions. High schools often label this activity a "four-year-plan." At the middle level school, it might be called a three-year-plan. A one-year-plan in either case outlines the schedules that students follow in a given year.

The teacher adviser must understand what these plans aim to do and how they relate to one another. Some schools even use a more specific goal setting process designed to reduce the disparity between student aspirations and life's realities. This plan usually contains a series of questions about what students wish to accomplish within a given time frame and some ideas for getting there. The plan form is completed in a conference between the adviser and advisee.

7. **REGISTRATION AND SCHEDULING.** Because advisers are in the unique position of knowing advisees better than any other professional in the school, they help advisees choose classes appropriate to their aspirations and current level of academic functioning.

The adviser needs information about the nature and content of the school program. This information may be included in the handbook as a simple description or may be presented more elaborately in a separate publication. The handbook also may propose a step-by-step procedure for helping students with selections. When the advisee's courses or programs are selected, the teacher adviser either develops the schedule or helps advisees to develop one. This section of the handbook describes that process.

8. **SCHOOLWIDE TESTING.** The adviser needs information about the tests the school gives. The tests may assess academic achievement, learning style, attitudes and interests, or others. The handbook provides the

schedule of testing for the year, along with a description of each test to be administered. For new or more comprehensive assessments like learning style, it is reasonable to include a general description of each scale. A sample profile is also helpful.

9. **INTERVIEWING GUIDELINES.** Teacher advisers conduct both parent and student conferences, so it is advisable to include guidelines for conducting them. Some handbooks give procedural checklists and sample questions for conferences.

10. **MISCELLANEOUS.** This section varies greatly from school to school and level to level. For example, the middle level advisement program usually contains many more group activities than does the high school program.

It is not unusual for middle level schools to develop separate handbooks of group activities to use in the adviser-advisee program. The faculty and staff of Tyrone Middle School, Pinellas County, Fla., for example, have activities at three different grade levels for advisers to use with their groups. High school advisement handbooks may include information about choosing a college, applying for financial aid, and planning for college and a career. Some middle level and high schools require the adviser to complete a quarterly report on the number of conferences held with advisees and parents, the number of teachers contacted regarding an advisee, and the names of advisees for whom additional help is needed.

11. **FORMS.** This section has copies of all the forms advisers use, with a description of how to complete each one.

The key to a good teacher adviser handbook is its usefulness. The handbook should be short yet complete in its coverage. As advisers work with the handbook, they will have suggestions for revisions and improvements. It is good practice to provide a process to revise the handbook every year or two to reflect feedback from active teacher advisers.

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